

Memorandum

TO: Michael McLaughlin, City Manager *mpm*
FROM: Jessica Bellah, Community Planner
VIA: Celia Craze, Director, Planning and Community Development
DATE: February 4, 2016
RE: Staff Review Greenbelt Station South Core Phase 3, DSP-13045

Background

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) has referred the Greenbelt Station South Core Phase Three (3) Detailed Site Plan (DSP-13045) to the City for review and comment. This case will be reviewed at the Planning Board level and a hearing date has been set for February 25, 2016. M-NCPPC has requested the City provide their comments for inclusion in Park and Planning's technical staff report by February 10, 2016.

Prior submissions of DSP – 13045 were reviewed by Council and staff. Staff had recommended opposition of the proposed plan and identified several areas for improvement. The applicant (Woodlawn Development Group) withdrew their application and prepared an alternative concept plan. Based on Council and staff comments on the alternative concept plan, the applicant has resubmitted DSP-13045. As outlined in the Development Agreement, the city is afforded approval authority of detailed site plans and architectural elevations for DSP-13045.

The Greenbelt Station South Core Site is zoned Mixed Use - Transportation Oriented (M-X-T) with a Development District Overlay Zone (DDOZ). Staff has reviewed the DSP, landscape plan, and architectural plans proposed in Phase 3. These elements were evaluated against conditions of the city's Development Agreement, conditions set during Conceptual Site Plan approvals, Prince George's County zoning standards, and best practices for urban design. It is staff's opinion that the current design adequately meets these review criteria if some modifications and revisions are made. Staff recommends approval with conditions.

Project and Site Background

In concept, Greenbelt Station South Core was approved as a medium density mixed use development. Phase 1 and 2 is located east of Greenbelt Station Parkway, abutting the Indian Creek Stream Valley. Phase 1/2 consists of 342 residential townhome units, 2.67 acres of publicly dedicated parkland and an estimated 0.45 acres of private recreational open space. Phase 3 is located west of Greenbelt Station Parkway, abutting the CSX and Metro rail lines. Phase 3 was originally approved in concept as condominium apartment residential units over retail with the provision of substantial internal amenities.

The Phase 3 DSP is submitted as a mixed-use plan consisting of 165 townhomes and a small neighborhood serving retail area. The one-half acre (21,802 SF) lot will serve as either public parkland or a 5,000 SF retail component. Final use of this parcel will be determined

following a one-year marketing effort and final determination for commercial feasibility. If determined to be unmarketable as retail, the lot shall convert to public use as a City of Greenbelt park. The park design should be subject to review and approval by the City.

Architecture, Urban Design and Open Space

The proposed townhome unit mix consists of 16', 20', and 24' wide products offered by Ryan Homes and NV Homes. The 24' Tyson model and 16' Hepburn/Clarendon models are new to the South Core development. All of the townhomes are four stories tall with an optional roof-top deck. All homes in Phase 3 would be rear-loaded with alleys providing access to their garages.

For homes located west of Road A, the public domain is dominated by the side elevations of end units. Side elevation facades are typically not required to be as detailed as front elevations since they are not the dominant elevation facing the public domain. The layout of Phase 3 creates a streetscape where the side elevations are a focal point of the public domain and the usually private vista of rear alleys are in the public view shed. Therefore, these side and rear elevations must be raised to a higher architectural standard.

In response to City comments that prior plans lacked adequate public open space, the applicant has provided three new pocket parks. The parks were created by increasing the size of two previously private courtyards to accommodate public use as pocket parks. As a result the remaining five courtyards have been reduced from 45-60 Ft in width to 28 – 50 Ft in width.¹ Although the unit count has increased from 161 to 165 units, total lot coverage has been reduced from 70-80% impervious lot coverage to 63% impervious cover.

The applicant has increased the unit count from 161 to 165 units. While this change is not inherently problematic, staff is concerned that townhome units are too densely packed in certain areas of the plan. As a result, open space, front yards, and streetscape are negatively impacted by this compression. Since Council last saw the concept plan, the applicant has added two units to the southwest most building groups. This has decreased the area originally presented as green space. Staff recommends that building groups for Lots 1-6 and 7-12 be reduced from 12 units to 10 units each. This would reduce the total unit count to 163.

Landscaping

The establishment of trees in paved areas requires a sufficient volume of soil or specialized structured soil to support tree root growth. The landscape plan shows a significant portion of trees located in alleyways and adjacent to driveways. The landscape plan also shows street trees planted in thin, undersized landscape strips. Staff supports the placement of trees in these locations but recommends the use of structured soil to ensure their viability.

¹ Actual dimensions of courtyards in prior submissions were 45, 47, 49, 57, 60, and 63 feet wide. New courtyard dimensions are 28, 33, 46, 50 and two pocket parks fronted by homes set at 70 and 85 feet wide.

The compression of streetscape areas is especially apparent in the landscape planting strips on Road A. At 3ft, the width of the eastern planting strip is not well suited to support the proposed street tree. The western planting strip is 5ft in width but lacks trees on this section of road between Lot 6 – 23. Lots 98 -107 and 126 – 141 show placement of the European Hornbeam tree within 2 Ft of building walls. While this tree is well suited for urban planting areas, most sources recommend the European Hornbeam be planted at a minimum 4 Ft from building walls and foundations.

Phase 3 is characterized by smaller front yards with minimal landscaping. Ample landscaping should be provided to offset smaller yards. Additionally, lots with front facades facing Greenbelt Station Parkway should have low ornamental fencing and/or brick walls to separate public and private spaces. The current landscape plan should show how the tree planting schedule works in concert with detailed landscaping for individual lots.

Phase 3 consists entirely of rear-loaded townhomes serviced by alley streetscapes with minimal opportunities for landscaping. Within the proposed DSP, there are areas of open soil between driveways ranging in width from 4ft – 8ft. These areas provide an opportunity to soften and green the alley systems with stretches of turf or shrub planting.

Lot and Building Group Size

Waivers were granted to the 1st and 2nd Phases of the Greenbelt Station South Core project on regulations pertaining to minimum lot size and maximum number of units in a building group. The granted minimum lot size for these phases was set at 1,240 SF and building groups of up to ten units were permitted. The applicant has submitted justifications to M-NCPPC to receive similar waivers for DSP -13045, Phase 3.

Phase 3, DSP- 13045 shows a lot size range from 992 – 2,961 SF. Sixty-nine (42%) units in Phase 3 are on lot sizes smaller than the 1,240 SF threshold. Staff recommends that lot sizes in Phase 3 adhere to the minimum 1,240 SF requirement as approved for Phase 1 and 2. This lot size is significantly less than the 1,800 SF called for in the Zoning Code for townhome units within M-X-T zones.

The Noise Barrier Wall

To meet noise mitigation standards, the developer is proposing a 14 Ft high wood noise barrier wall between the site and the adjacent rail lines. This wall wraps around the entire west and north sides of the project area. Previous plan submissions showed inadequate setbacks from the sound barrier wall to adjacent properties. The applicant has applied a minimum setback of 15 Ft from all buildings and 10 Ft from all property lines as requested by the City.

To provide additional open landscaped area, the applicant reached agreement with WMATA to place the noise barrier wall to the outside of a WMATA easement area on the southwest point of the DSP area. This area could be further improved by extending the noise

barrier wall further south, providing more distance from Lot 1 and allowing additional room for vehicles to access the WMATA easement property without impacting this residential unit.

The City also requested the applicant replace the proposed wooden wall with a masonry wall and include enhanced landscaping to soften the wall. The applicant has made no changes to the proposed noise barrier wall.

The Pedestrian Overpass

The applicant is required to show the general location for landing a pedestrian overpass connecting the City of Greenbelt to the City of College Park. The applicant is not required to construct the overpass, but must provide adequate space to accommodate a future structure within Phase 3. The District Council resolution for CSP-01008-02 states that the “general location of the College Park pedestrian overpass shall be on the west side of the railroad south of the city’s Public Works facility on industrial-zoned property west of the tracks...”.

The current placement of the pedestrian overpass does not meet the condition of the District Council’s resolution on its College Park landing site. On the Greenbelt side, the pedestrian access ramp as shown is isolated. It is separated from the neighborhood both physically and visually by the noise barrier wall. This design impairs visual connectivity between users of the bridge and the public, creating an unsafe condition. In addition, the overpass landing site is adjacent to the Storm Water Management Pond B site. It is not clear if the applicant has verified with Prince George's County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPW&T) that the pedestrian overpass would be permitted to land where it is shown.

The Council has previously discussed the alignment of the overpass, the underlying conditions governing its location, and the desirability of accommodating this connection. Council requested staff provide alternative locations for the overpass, including the option for removing it in its entirety. If Council opposes the overpass, staff recommends it be removed from the CSP conditions. If there is to be a pedestrian overpass connection associated with Greenbelt Station South Core, staff recommends its design and placement meet the following conditions:

- 1) The pedestrian overpass alignment should conform to the CSP condition.
- 2) The overpass must be safe. It must be visible to public view and not isolated.
- 3) The overpass should have minimal impact on the residents of Greenbelt Station with sufficient screening and setbacks.
- 4) The overpass should not consume public green space.
- 5) Access to the ramp should be clearly delineated and readily apparent to the public.
- 6) The overpass must have the ability to be approved by all relevant agencies including DPW&T, WMATA, CSX, the City of College Park, and M-NCPPC.

Should Council wish to pursue the pedestrian overpass, staff recommends the adoption of Alternative Alignment 2A shown in Toole Design Group’s Addendum to Report – Additional Alignments. This would necessitate the removal of six units, Lots 17, 18, 19, 24, 25, 26 to

provide space for the structure and adequate room for screening. Staff recommends the creation of a separate parcel dedicated to the purpose of a pedestrian overpass.

The alternative would be to request the elimination of the overpass from the plan.

Roads, Driveways, and Pedestrian Connections

Pedestrian connectivity in Phase 3 should receive the highest priority. Pedestrian movement is enhanced by the use of frequent path connections. The spaces between building groups provide an opportunity to create functional public space and provide pathways that promote walkability. Parcel G and F, located between lots 118/119 and 133/134, are underutilized dead space. Walking paths should be added to this area to enhance pedestrian connectivity within Phase 3.

Staff Recommendation

While the applicant has revised the plan to accommodate previous comments and requests from the city, staff wishes to stress that many of these revisions are at the expense of other valuable plan elements. DSP Phase 3 reflects characteristic trade-offs and compromises that, taken on the whole, reflects a better plan than previous submissions.

Staff recommends approval of DSP-13045, Phase 3, Greenbelt Station South Core, subject to the following conditions:

- 1) The City opposes the location of the pedestrian overpass as shown on the plan. Prior to certificate approval of the DSP, the applicant shall revise the site plan to (designate either a or b)
 - a. Accommodate Alternative Alignment 2A as shown in Toole Design Group's Addendum to Report – Additional Alignment. A separate parcel shall be created of sufficient size to accommodate the 2A trail alignment. Lots 17, 18, 19, 24, 25, and 26 shall be removed from the plan.

OR

 - b. Remove the pedestrian overpass from the plans in its entirety. The applicant shall seek to remove the CSP condition associated with the overpass.
- 2) The applicant shall clarify the status of Lot 166 as either a private and dues paying member of the home owners association or a public property wholly separate from the HOA.

- 3) All units shall meet the 1,240 SF minimum lot size threshold as is the standard in Phase 1 and 2.
- 4) All driveways in Phase 3 shall be stamped decorative concrete to mirror applications made in Phase 1 and 2 of the Greenbelt Station project. Asphalt driveways shall not be permitted.
- 5) The applicant shall either extend the entirety of the noise barrier wall further south or turn the southern end section on the diagonal with the end wall terminating closer to the driveway entrance of Lot 1. See Figure 1.
- 6) The noise barrier wall shall be constructed of a masonry material. Final design is subject to City approval.
- 7) A pedestrian walkway shall be designed and located on Parcel G and F to provide an inviting and formal connection between Greenbelt Station Parkway and Road A.
- 8) All stoops shall adhere to a minimum depth and width of 4 Ft x 4 Ft. No front stoops shall be located in areas dedicated as Public Utility Easements.
 - a. Front stoops for Lots 98 -107, 126 – 14, and 157 - 165 shall be set back from the public utility easement area.
 - b. The 16' Hepburn and Clarendon stoops shall be adjusted to minimum depth and width of 4 Ft x 4 Ft from their current dimensions of 3 Ft x 5 Ft.
- 9) The applicant shall revise DSP -13045 to show the tower offset for the NVR Tyson model.
- 10) For each building group that contains the Tyson model, dormers shall be incorporated in at least 50% of units with front elevation “J” or “G”.
- 11) The Clarendon model shall only be offered in its “traditional” style form. The V3 version shall not be offered or constructed as part of the Greenbelt Station project.
- 12) Rear elevations for townhome units located west of Road A shall be elevated to a higher architectural standard. These units are prominently within the public view shed and shall meet the following standards:
 - a. Within each building group, the rear elevations shall not be constructed wholly of vinyl siding.

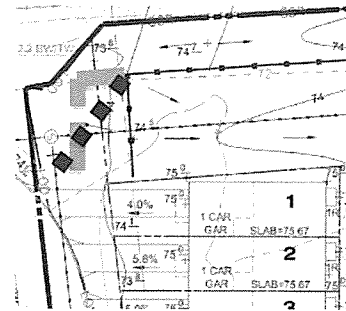


Figure 1

- b. Varying heights of partial brick veneer siding shall be used for rear elevations to include ½ story, 1 story, 1 ½ story, and 2 story brick facades. At least 50% of units in each building group shall contain 1 ½ story and 2 story partial brick veneers.
 - c. The side and rear elevations for end units whose side fronts Road A shall have matching brick façade heights.
- 13) Side elevations of the Clarendon Model, which front Road A, shall be enhanced with greater architectural details, more prominent windows and window casings, and/or other projections/recesses. Improvements are subject to City of Greenbelt review and approval.
- 14) Elements such as arcades, porches, bay windows, display cases, balconies, architectural details such as detailed brick patterns and shutters, and/or other projections/recesses shall be incorporated into the side elevations of homes fronting the west side of Road A.
- 15) The High Visibility Lot² designation for either Lot 12 or Lot 16 shall be adjusted from the currently assigned one star designation to be either a two or three star designation.
- 16) The High Visibility Lot designation for either Lot 66 or 71 shall be adjusted from the currently assigned one star designation to be either a two or three star designation.
- 17) Street trees shall be placed on the western side of Road A between Lots 6 – 23.
- 18) Planting strips of either side of Road A shall be widened to allow for at least five feet of planted landscape buffer.
- 19) Structured soils shall be used for all tree plantings located in alleys, near driveways, and for all street trees. This detail should be indicated on the landscape plan and shall reference CU-Structural Soil™ or an equivalent as approved by the City.
- 20) Trees of the European Hornbeam variety, currently located in private yards fronting Greenbelt Station Parkway shall be located, at minimum, four feet from building foundations and walls. Alternatively, the applicant may substitute a different tree species that is appropriate for planting within 2 Ft of building foundations and walls. Substitution is subject to City approval.
- 21) A typical planting plan for the townhome lots shall be provided to the City and is subject to City approval. Front yards for homes fronting Greenbelt Station Parkway shall be heavily landscaped.

² High Visibility Lots are designated with one of three brick veneer heights as follows: one star (*) indicate 1st floor brick, two stars (**) indicate two floors brick, three stars (***) indicate full brick sides.

- 22) Fruit trees shall be incorporated into the two larger pocket park areas for local food production.
- 23) Additional bench seating shall be placed in the two largest pocket parks to accommodate public use of these spaces. Placement of benches is subject to City approval.
- 24) Rocks or other hardscape cover shall be prohibited as a landscaping method for rear-loaded townhome units. Areas of open soil between driveways shall be landscaped with either turf or shrub planting and mulch.
- 25) The applicant shall construct a low ornamental fence/wall delineating the front yards of homes on Greenbelt Station Parkway from the public realm. If the applicant demonstrates that no fencing/walls are allowable within the platted Public Utilities Easement (PUE), the PUE should be adjusted to allow for the construction of a low ornamental fence. Design of the fence/wall is subject to City of Greenbelt approval.
- 26) The applicant shall designate the north most pocket park in Parcel B as a space suitable to maintain a composting and community garden area, should the home owner's association choose to pursue these amenities.
- 27) Building groups for Lots 1-6 and 7-12 shall be reduced from 6 units each to 5 units each to restore the green open space as originally presented in prior submissions.
- 28) Ground floor residential units fronting Greenbelt Station Parkway shall have a raised finish floor at least 24 inches above the sidewalk grade to provide sufficient privacy for ground-floor residents.
- 29) Should Lot 116 be determined feasible for retail use, the commercial building and lot design shall be subject to review as a DSP revision. The final design is subject to City review and approval.
- 30) Eliminate the curb cut to Lot 116. Final design is subject to future review.
- 31) Add curb around Lot 116.
- 32) Lot 116 shall not be used as a staging area during construction and shall be maintained as a level, graded surface presentable for marketing.